



## Leader Tool Defining Flexibility

As leaders, we are constantly challenged to live, breathe and achieve flexibility. What we've seen throughout COVID-19 is that those individuals, teams and organisations that value flexibility are those that are more successfully navigating challenges through the pandemic. The other trait those people and organisations demonstrate in regards to flexibility is that they have a very clear definition of what they are talking about when they say 'flexibility'. We've spoken about the importance of both language and clarity across the pandemic. A clear and common definition of what we mean when we say those big important words is critical in helping our people understand and then do it.

As a leader, this starts with engaging your people in a conversation about what flexibility means to them and how it can impact their role and their performance. It also helps start a fantastic conversation with your people about how being flexible can help them be their best in life at work. More importantly, flexibility helps all of your people go on the continual journey of change we all find ourselves on. How can we harness this flexible mindset and flexible behavioural approach to support being our best?

**Turn flexibility into a valued trait:** Few organisations would have flexibility as one of their cultural behaviours. However, when thinking through how people could live our organisational values, flexibility would enable success for many people and organisations. Flexibility implies an openness to others, a willingness to adapt and fundamentally an ability to move around or over things that might be considered obstacles by others. Publically recognise, acknowledge and celebrate those people and teams that have demonstrated flexibility. As leaders, we can help foster and model ways of working, thinking and behaviours that set our people up for success in consistently replicating positive responses until they become habits.

**Flexible work:** There is no right way of doing flexible work. Each individual and team across every organisation will have a different, varied and nuanced way of trying to implement flexible work. As leaders, the last thing we should be doing is trying to create and implement a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting our people to be flexible in their work. As we transition, it is important to have a conversation with all of your people to understand what is important to them and what does a flexible workspace or way of work look like for them and your organisation's needs. The feedback can inform considered decision making and your people will feel they have been consulted and heard, which can result in feeling valued and engaged.

**Flexibility of role and type of work:** Flexing and flexibility are important for organisations, in responding to immediate organisational needs, people needs or outside conditions. Leaders who can demonstrate that they value people being responsive and adaptable will help create this approach. As leaders, we need to identify how to support flexibility through listening, communicating and looking for solutions. For some, structure means comfort and certainty and flexibility might feel uncomfortable listen to their concerns and work with them. More importantly, it helps your people feel they have some control over how to do their work and fulfill their role, which is an important element of creating psychological safety in the workspace.



**Flexibility for balance:** Listen to your people, recognising their individual circumstances builds engagement and understanding. Giving your people the responsibility to manage the way they deliver their commitments demonstrates and builds trust. The greater control we feel we have can lead to confidence and generally reduces stress levels. There are many situations where flexibility of this type is not possible. Communicating expectations and providing coaching and support when changes are implemented is vital for success.

At AccessEAP, we have seen that organisations that actively look to improve communication, listening and engagement, bring their people along the journey when there are big decisions to be made. As leaders, we find ourselves constantly making decisions to transform and change our organisation through the challenges of the pandemic, but taking the time to take our people on the journey helps build the flexible mindsets in our people, teams and organisations.

Finally, talk with your people about flexibility as a strength which can be developed and can lead to greater resilience, as your people will be able to adapt to rapid change. Flexibility for employees whether in workplace, role, or teams aims to avoid comparisons and increases engagement. For example, one person gets in early and the other later – communication is key to understanding and negotiating needs and expectations.

The message here is find out what your staff mean when they discuss and ask about flexibility. It may mean starting at one part of the day in the office, then leaving part way through to attend to caring needs or a yoga class – all with the understanding that there is a return to work afterwards. For others it means starting earlier, later or working four days instead of five. If you need some assistance in starting this conversation, call our Manager Support Hotline for further ideas. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact AccessEAP on **1800 818 728**.

*AccessEAP acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land we work on and their continuing connection to land, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.*

